

**Kathmandu** – The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) announced the opening of its regional office in Janakpur, Dhanusha on December 8, 2008. USAID/OTI previously operated a regional office in Itahari, Sunsari. The shift to Janakpur is expected to enable smooth OTI assistance efforts in districts across the Terai, namely Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, and Sarlahi.

USAID/OTI programs, begun in August 2006, are designed to help advance Nepal's transition to peace and democracy by increasing Nepalis' access to information and fostering public debate of issues critical to the political transition. These efforts will increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.

"The flooding and breakdown of road transportation across the Saptakoshi severely hindered USAID/OTI's ability to serve communities to the west of the river, warranting the shift out of Sunsari," said Beth S. Paige, Mission Director of USAID/Nepal. "Though the office has been moved to Janakpur, USAID/OTI's assistance to districts east of the Saptakoshi will continue. USAID/Nepal, through its other programs, will also continue to provide flood relief assistance to Sunsari and other flood-affected districts of the Terai."

USAID/OTI programs involve a series of small grants and short-term technical assistance to activities that further Nepal's transition process. The programs are implemented through local NGO partners and other community based organizations. A recent example is a series of 12 local, weekly radio talk shows that will link Constituent Assembly representatives and local officials to their constituents in six districts around the country during the constitution-writing process. Citizens will be able to ask questions and seek clarification from their representatives, making the democratic process real to them.

USAID/OTI opened its regional office in Itahari, Sunsari in July 2007 and had since worked with several local NGOs in Ilam, Jhapa, Dhankuta, Morang, Sunsari, Udayapur, Saptari, and Siraha to support the peace process. During the past year, USAID/OTI funded 50 grants totaling \$1.5 million.